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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to show how American Catholic bishops go about preparing a pastoral letter on a public issue. The actual preparation of a pastoral letter includes a number of complicated issues. The first two chapters provide background on the bishops' current letter. "Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy," tracing the recent history of Catholic social teaching, and the progress of the committee charged with drafting the letter. Chapter 3 assesses the breadth of the committee's consultation and its response to criticism of the draft. Chapter 4 surveys the political outlook of the committee members and their chief advisors. Chapter 5, the final chapter, treats a subject that is now hotly debated among Catholic theologians: the teaching authority of a bishop's conference. (BZ)

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How Bishops Decide

An American Catholic Case Study

Philip F. Lawler

Foreword by Richard John Neuhaus

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Ernest W. Lefever, President
ETHICS AND PUBLIC POLICY CENTER
1030 Fifteenth Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20005
(202) 682-1200

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PHILIP F. LAWLER is the editor of *Catholicism in Crisis* (South Bend, Indiana) and president of the American Catholic Conference. He has written frequently on the Catholic Church and public policy in a wide variety of magazines and journals. His most recent book is *The Ultimate Weapon* (Ignatius Press, 1984).

RICHARD JOHN NEUHAUS, a Lutheran pastor, directs the Center for Religion and Society (New York). His study of religion and politics, *The Naked Public Square*, was published by Eerdmans in 1985.

Foreword

RICHARD JOHN NEUHAUS

THERE ARE MANY reasons why both Catholics and non-Catholics should pay close attention to this study. Mr. Lawler explores the place of moral judgment in public discourse, a vital interest to every responsible citizen. He also addresses how institutions, especially religious institutions, exercise leadership on questions of public importance. Both topics are of particular interest to believers of every faith.

I do not just "happen" to believe that the Catholic Church faces a singular moment of responsibility and opportunity to provide leadership in American public life. I am deeply convinced that this is the case. For many reasons it seems to me that this ought to be "the Catholic moment" in American religious and cultural history. And, since I believe that politics is in large part a function of culture and that religion is the heart of culture, "the Catholic moment" also has broad political ramifications. One reason why this should be the Catholic moment is the default of the old Protestant mainline churches in providing culturally formative moral leadership.

Please do not misunderstand. The mainline churches should in no way be written off or cast into what Lenin called "the dustbin of history." They still claim the allegiance of millions of Americans, and many within their leadership circles recognize "the crisis of the mainline" and are striving for renewal. In addition, there are vibrant new religious actors in the public square, notably the evangelicals in all their variety and what is usually referred to as "the religious New Right." So the Catholic moment in no way implies a Catholic monopoly. Catholics should be the first in saying they do not want such a monopoly, and most of them do say that very firmly. But there is a Catholic opportunity, and perhaps a Catholic obligation, to take the lead.

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Catholics should take the lead because they are far and away the largest single faith community in the United States. They should take the lead because, even though Catholicism has been here for centuries, only in relatively recent times have Catholics been fully admitted to circles that make decisions about how we Americans ought to order our life together. (This is not to deny that anti-Catholicism is still alive and well in sectors of American culture. It is, and sometimes virulently so. But only on the fringes of our common life does anyone still question whether being "Catholic" and being "American" are compatible.) And Catholics should take the lead because they are the bearers of a tradition that is rich in reflection on the connections between theological and political truth.

Some Catholics, including many bishops, believe that the Catholic Church is responding very creatively to its moment of responsibility and opportunity in American life. They point to such evidence as the pastoral letters on war and peace and on economics, as well as the lively networks of social activism under Catholic auspices. And yet it is precisely with respect to such evidence, notably the pastoral letters, that Mr. Lawler raises disturbing questions. One must at least ask the question whether the bishops in particular are, however inadvertently, following the Protestant mainline churches along the path toward cultural and political marginality.

In the view of some Catholic and Protestant leaders, marginality is the price to be paid for being "prophetic." Indeed, some go so far as almost to equate marginality and prophecy. This is not the place for a treatise on the meaning of prophecy in biblical faith. Suffice it to say that in the Bible most of those who claimed to be prophets were false prophets. There is no reason to suppose that the pattern has changed since the time of, say, Jeremiah or Amos.

In biblical times Yahweh typically took true prophets by the scruff of the neck and forced them to do their prophetic duty, with the prophet-elect protesting all the way that he was not fit to be a prophet. In most of our churches today the production of prophets seems to require a lesser measure of divine intervention. From our seminaries we have career tracks in prophetic ministry, producing prophets with tenure and entire church departments devoted to issuing press releases of prophetic utterance. An inflation of prophecy has grievously debased the meaning of prophecy.

Individual Christians, church leaders, and churches do want to address the "moral issues" engaged in the ordering of our common life. And so they should, critically as well as affirmatively. But they should do so as participants in an ongoing conversation, employing the same instruments of reason and fallible judgments as do other participants, believers and nonbelievers alike. One would hope that being a Christian makes a difference in motivation, style, and substance. But the arguments we would make in the public arena as Christians or as churches must be genuinely *public* arguments. That is, such arguments must be accessible to and vulnerable to the scrutiny of all reasonable people.

Whether from the left or from the right of the political spectrum, we cannot stand over against the public discussion and proclaim that we have a unique word from the Lord. Those who attempt to do that are rightly subject to being dismissed as fanatics, or at least as morally pretentious persons who do not understand the rules and limits of public discourse. Of course, one has no choice but to run the risk of being so dismissed *if* one is indeed possessed of such a prophetic word from the Lord.

Most religious leaders do not seriously claim that they possess, or are possessed by, such a word. They do not really mean to suggest that they have resources that are denied to others for understanding God's will in the political order. They do not really mean to suggest that their moral sensibility is greatly superior to that of other citizens who are attempting to work through the same public problems. But they are frequently understood to be saying all of these things. It is that perception which has so largely brought mainline Protestant political pronouncements and actions into cultural disrepute. Mr. Lawler indicates some of the ways in which Catholic leadership is also being misunderstood and misperceived, and he offers some compelling reasons for Catholic leaders to ask themselves how their purposes might better be advanced.

In particular, the present study should prompt a careful examination of the sociology of organizations and bureaucracies as these affect church leadership. Closest attention should be paid, I believe, to what Mr. Lawler implicitly and explicitly says about the role of the laity in the light of Catholic (and indeed ecumenical) teaching. The "clericalization of political discourse," rampant in mainline Protestantism, is disturbingly evident in contemporary Catholicism as well. Mr. Lawler also makes an important contribution by underscoring the need to distin-

guish clearly between "moral" judgments and the many judgments that we may embrace with passion, even with moral urgency. It would be a great benefit were the churches to help rescue public discourse from its tendency to confuse moral argument with the strength of our subjective feelings. Finally, Mr. Lawler is rightly insistent that there is a moral obligation for participants in public discourse, including religious participants, to know what they are talking about. In these and other ways this study can enhance moral reflection on the American experiment in democratic governance.

Introduction

THIS STUDY is intended to show the interested reader how the American Catholic bishops go about preparing a pastoral letter on a public issue. Toward that end, it examines the bishops' work on their current controversial letter, "Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy." It will offer *not* a critique of the content of that statement—many such critiques are already available—but an analysis of the *process* whereby the bishops arrive at their decisions. The study will also raise some questions about how the bishops might increase their effectiveness as moral teachers.

Twice in this decade the Catholic bishops of the United States have ignited political controversy with their pastoral letters. In 1983, their statement on nuclear weapons, "The Challenge of Peace," vaulted them into the middle of a heated partisan debate on the "nuclear freeze." Before that debate had died away, the bishops were already in the headlines for their work on an equally controversial topic: the moral status of the U.S. economic system.

Until fairly recently, the American hierarchy had generally been perceived as relatively apolitical. When the bishops did make their presence felt on the American political scene—most notably in their opposition to abortion—they favored conservative positions. Now, in an apparent reversal, the prelates seemed to be embracing a much more liberal set of political goals.

Most Americans (including most American Catholics) pay very little attention to developments within the hierarchy. To the ordinary layman, the bishops' controversial statements seemed to appear *ex nihilo*, popping up in the headlines without prior warning. But anyone who had been following the progress of Catholic social teaching in this

century, and especially the work of the American bishops, could not have been terribly surprised.

In the Roman Catholic Church, bishops are teachers, leaders, judges, and administrators within their dioceses. The Catholic Church teaches that a bishop enjoys the fullness of all priestly powers; he ministers to all the needs of the people within his see. On doctrinal questions, he is the final authority within his diocese; except under extraordinary circumstances (e.g., when other bishops disagree), all Catholics are bound to follow his guidance. On questions that do not directly involve the interpretation of church doctrine, Catholics are enjoined to take their bishop's advice seriously, although it is not considered morally binding.

All Catholic bishops are appointed to their posts by the pope. (In practice, local bishops exercise a good deal of influence in the appointment process, working through the papal nuncio, the pope's ambassador.) Virtually all bishops serve until death or retirement; the statutory age for retirement is seventy-five. Within the United States there are roughly 300 active bishops.

The American hierarchy operates two closely related national organizations. The National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) is a canonical group (i.e., one established by church law), through which the bishops work together on issues of common concern. All active American bishops are members of the NCCB; retired bishops may participate in discussions but cannot vote. All bishops—cardinals, archbishops, bishops, and auxiliary bishops—enjoy equal privileges within this national episcopal conference.

The United States Catholic Conference (USCC) is an official but non-canonical body through which the bishops address public issues. It has a full-time Washington staff. The bishops who are officers of the NCCB double as officers of the USCC, but USCC work is done by the staff; no bishops serve full-time with the organization. In practice, formal statements by the bishops—such as pastoral letters—are generally issued by the NCCB, with the USCC coordinating the effort.

Theoretically, the process of producing a pastoral letter is simple and straightforward. At the annual meeting of the NCCB, a bishop may suggest the need for a statement on some topic; if his colleagues agree, they may call for the drafting of a pastoral letter. The president of the NCCB then appoints a committee to draft the document, which is presented to a subsequent NCCB meeting for the bishops' approval. If 80

per cent of the NCCB members vote in favor of it, the statement is formally issued as a pastoral letter.

The actual preparation of a pastoral letter—especially on a controversial topic—involves a number of more subtle, complicated questions. Who actually writes the letter? What is the role of the USCC staff? Do the bishops take seriously comments and criticisms from outside the episcopal conference? How do the bishops ensure that their letter will be widely read and accurately understood? Are Catholics obliged to obey the guidance of a pastoral letter?

Questions like these will concern us in this study. The first two chapters provide some background on the bishops' current project, tracing the recent history of Catholic social teaching and the progress of the committee charged with drafting the statement on the U.S. economy. Chapter three assesses the breadth of the committee's consultation and its response to criticism of the draft. Chapter four surveys the political outlook of the committee members and their chief advisors. The final chapter treats a subject that is now hotly debated among Catholic theologians: the teaching authority of a bishops' conference.

Readers should be aware that the author of this study has played an active role in the discussion of the bishops' controversial statements on nuclear weapons and the economy. In describing the process whereby the bishops reach their conclusions, I have tried to be objective; in appraising their results I offer my own opinions. No doubt many readers will disagree with those opinions. But I hope that this study will stimulate discussion of the bishops' decision-making process.

CHAPTER ONE

Recent Catholic Social Thought

THE TRADITION OF CATHOLIC teaching on social issues stretches back to Saint Peter and beyond, to the testimonies of the great Hebrew prophets. In the fourth and fifth centuries Saint Augustine contributed profound reflections on how Christianity could be applied to the political life of the declining Roman Empire. Eight hundred years later Saint Thomas Aquinas worked out Catholic social principles in the age of feudalism. These teachers and countless others helped build up the complex and sophisticated body of thought known as Catholic social teaching.

In the modern era, Catholic social teaching placed a new emphasis on economic life. In 1891, Pope Leo XIII issued an encyclical letter entitled *Rerum Novarum*, now generally regarded as the first of the "social" encyclicals. Strongly supportive of the nascent labor-union movement, *Rerum Novarum* was equally insistent on the right to private property and on the incompatibility of Christianity with Marxism. Forty years later, Pope Pius XI followed up with *Quadragesimo Anno* (the title itself refers back to Leo's encyclical), reaffirming his predecessor's arguments and calling upon national governments to reject the concentrations of power that marked that totalitarian era.

The most important milestone in the development of recent Catholic social teaching was the Second Vatican Council, held in Rome between 1960 and 1965. Vatican II ushered in a new era in the Catholic understanding of social action. The Council fathers insisted that the quest for personal holiness could not be divorced from the quest for social justice, and that social work was as authentically Christian as private prayer. Pope John XXIII, who convened the Council, underscored the

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importance of working to change society in two memorable encyclicals of his own, *Mater et Magistra* (1961) and *Pacem in Terris* (1963). His successor, Pope Paul VI, called for special attention to the plight of impoverished nations in *Populorum Progressio*. The current pope, John Paul II, is a committed social activist who stands clearly in the post-Conciliar stream of Catholic teaching.

Just before the American bishops began the long process of producing a pastoral letter on economics, Pope John Paul made a remarkable contribution to the Catholic dialogue on economics. His 1981 encyclical *Laborem Exercens* renewed traditional Catholic support for the rights of workers, but also introduced a new element into the discussion. While past encyclicals had concentrated on the *distribution* of the world's wealth, John Paul focused on the importance of work in *creating* wealth. Basing his analysis on a detailed study of the Book of Genesis, the Pope argued that man is endowed by God with a mighty creative urge that provides the motive force for all his economic activities. This insight was an obvious departure from the standard capitalist notions as put forth by Adam Smith, who taught that capitalism is fueled by individuals' pursuit of their own self-interest. It provided a new perspective on the ethics of economic life.

Influences from Latin America

The work of twentieth-century popes and the teachings of the Second Vatican Council have influenced the American bishops in noticeable ways. Slightly less apparent, but no less important, has been the influence of the Catholic Church in Latin America. Since the close of Vatican II, the bishops of that region have become a major force for political and economic change. Decrying the inequalities rampant throughout Latin America, the Church has developed a new understanding of social justice and has worked closely with advocates of political reform. In a now famous meeting of the Latin American bishops held in Medellín, Colombia, in 1968, the new Catholic outlook was given a name: the "preferential option for the poor." The exact meaning of that "preferential option" has been debated continuously since that time.

The most controversial interpretation of this "option" is found in "liberation theology." Although the more virulent forms of liberation theology have earned a rebuke from the Vatican, its fundamental mes-

sage—that the Church exists not only to help men reach salvation in the afterlife but also to bring the Kingdom of God closer to fruition in *this* world—has become a prominent part of Catholic social teaching, particularly in the Western Hemisphere.

The U.S. bishops have a special relationship to their colleagues in Latin America. The Catholic Church in the United States is economically secure—indeed, it is known for its wealth—and U.S. prelates have traditionally reached out to their impoverished neighbors. Many U.S. dioceses have adopted "sister dioceses" in Central America; many U.S. missionaries have worked in the region. And for clerics familiar with the comforts of North American life, the grinding poverty of Central America is a continual reminder that our nation's wealth is an exception in international life.

Previous Policy Stands

The pastoral letter on economics is not the first foray of the American hierarchy into domestic social politics. In 1919 the National Catholic Welfare Conference—predecessor of the present NCCB—issued a detailed and provocative statement on the need for economic changes in American life. Many of the proposals contained in that 1919 document found their way into New Deal legislation; most were eventually embraced in Democratic party platforms.

More recently, the NCCB and the USCC have issued policy statements on subjects as diverse as the Vietnam war and traffic safety. The American bishops have publicly supported the Panama Canal treaty, the Humphrey-Hawkins Act to guarantee full employment, SALT II, and tuition tax credits; they have opposed U.S. involvement in the Vietnam war, capital punishment, abortion, U.S. military aid to El Salvador, and the Equal Rights Amendment.

Clearly, then, the bishops had not suddenly discovered politics when they began writing their pastoral on nuclear arms; they had been taking stands on a wide range of political issues for decades. But it was the "peace pastoral" that captured the attention of the political world. In the public discussions leading up to the final version of that letter, the bishops flirted with condemning U.S. policies of nuclear deterrence; many prelates clearly favored such a condemnation. Although the official document stopped short of a blanket condemnation, its carefully conditioned, almost grudging acceptance of deterrence policy left mil-

itary strategists uneasy. In the nuclear age, could loyal Catholics continue to serve in the armed forces? Would they follow orders in time of war?

The powerful political impact of the "peace pastoral" caused many to fear a similar outcome from the bishops' work on economics. And in June 1983, the Canadian bishops' conference exacerbated those fears by releasing a stinging denunciation of capitalism largely couched in Marxist terms. "The present recession," the Canadian statement warned, "appears to be symptomatic of a much larger structural crisis in the international system of capitalism." The bishops went on to advocate "an alternative economic model that would place emphasis on—socially useful forms of production; labor-intensive industries; the use of appropriate forms of technology; self-reliant models of economic development; community ownership and control of industries; new forms of worker management and ownership; and greater use of the renewable energy sources in industrial production."

Would the U.S. bishops issue a similarly radical statement? Would their views on economic matters cause as heated a debate as their recent statement on nuclear weapons? The stage was set.

CHAPTER TWO

Drafting the Pastoral Letter

DRAFTING, REVISING, debating, and approving a pastoral letter is a slow, complicated process. If the bishops approve the economics pastoral in November 1986 as currently scheduled, the final vote will come almost exactly six years after the process began.

At the annual meeting of the NCCB in November 1980, the bishops approved a pastoral letter on Marxism. Since it was an abstract document, more a theological inquiry than a political statement, that letter received very little attention outside the bishops' conference. But it did provoke some results within the conference. Peter Rosazza, the auxiliary bishop of Hartford, Connecticut, suggested that the bishops' criticism of Marxism be balanced by a critique of capitalism. A motion from the floor carried, and the NCCB embarked on the new project.

The NCCB and its companion body, the USCC, have a number of standing committees. Since the NCCB is made up exclusively of bishops, only bishops sit on its committees. In the USCC, bishops chair committees, but priests, members of religious orders, and laity also serve as members. Had the bishops intended to produce a public-policy statement on economics, that task might have fallen to the USCC committee on Social Development and World Peace. But they voted to prepare a pastoral letter—an ecclesiastical document—and their 1980 resolution called for the creation of a special *ad hoc* committee to undertake the task.

The creation of an *ad hoc* committee is not an unusual step; the NCCB currently has seventeen such committees at work on problems ranging from the release of clergy from their vows to the problems of farm labor. The president of the NCCB (who is elected to a three-year

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term by vote of all the bishops) has the authority to select the committee chairmen. Archbishop John Roach of St. Paul, then the president of the NCCB, appointed Milwaukee's Archbishop Rembert Weakland as chairman of the new committee. Four more bishops were also appointed to the committee: Archbishop Thomas Donnellan of Atlanta, Bishop George Speltz of St. Cloud, Minnesota, Bishop William Weigand of Salt Lake City, and Auxiliary Bishop Peter Rosazza, whose suggstion had set the process in motion.

How the Committee Operates

The bishops' *ad hoc* committees function fairly autonomously, periodically presenting reports to the full body of bishops for comments or for approval. Archbishop Weakland's committee quickly selected a staff (the composition of which will be described in chapter four) and began the long process of collecting information and hearing testimony. When they first set to work in early 1981, the bishops expected to present a final draft to the NCCB meeting in November 1985.

For over two years, the Weakland committee worked in relative obscurity. From 1981 through 1983, the bishops' pastoral letter on nuclear weapons monopolized the news; the preparation of the economics pastoral received virtually no attention. The drafting committee began by holding "hearings," at which expert witnesses selected by the committee staff gave the bishops their views.

By all accounts, the bishops conduct these sessions informally. On the rare occasions when Archbishop Weakland and his colleagues have referred to them, they have avoided such formal terms as "testimony" and "witness," in favor of "consultation" and "discussion," or even "listening session." There is no formal agenda for the sessions. Apparently some witnesses present formal testimony, while others simply answer the bishops' questions.

Unlike congressional committees, the bishops' drafting committee keeps no record of the testimony it hears. The hearings are closed, and bishops do not ordinarily discuss in public what they have heard. Consequently, anyone who wants to know what sort of information the bishops have received can only guess. The Weakland committee, however, has released lists of the witnesses at each session.

The Weakland committee began its hearings in November 1981. In 1982, hearings were held in February, April, August, September, and November, and the committee set a similar schedule for 1983. Before

they finished, the bishops had heard from over 100 people—theologians, economists, social workers, politicians, business executives, labor leaders, biblical scholars, and even a few poor people who were asked to explain "how the system looks to them."

In May 1983 the NCCB approved and released its pastoral letter on nuclear weapons. By November, when the bishops gathered in Washington for their annual meeting, the focus of attention had shifted to the letter on economics. Archbishop Weakland, in a progress report on behalf of the drafting committee, told his fellow bishops that the subject of the letter had been changed. Capitalism, the committee had decided, could not be handled in the same theoretical fashion that the bishops had used for their pastoral letter on Marxism. Since capitalism "is so diversified and diffuse that no single theoretical position is adequate" to define it, the drafting committee had shifted to a more specific topic: the U.S. economy.

Archbishop Weakland also reported that his committee had tentatively set the organizational framework for the first draft of the pastoral. The letter would give special attention to four major policy areas: (1) employment, unemployment, and the creation of jobs; (2) poverty and welfare; (3) international trade and Third World poverty; and (4) national economic planning.

Weakland also announced an amended schedule for publishing a first draft. Ordinarily, a document scheduled for discussion at the bishops' annual November meeting is circulated among the bishops two months beforehand. In an election year this means that the document is circulated at the height of the campaign season. The bishops had been widely criticized for circulating a draft of the peace pastoral during the 1982 campaign, when the nuclear freeze was a major issue before the voters. Although he insisted that his committee would not produce a politically partisan document, Archbishop Weakland also wished to avoid even the appearance of political involvement. Therefore, his committee decided to withhold publication of its first draft until after the 1984 presidential and congressional elections.

The Committee at Work

The following month the drafting committee provided a rare opportunity for the public to observe its work. In mid-December 1983, the University of Notre Dame convened a three-day symposium on the letter, and the Weakland committee made the occasion a formal part of

its information-gathering schedule. In effect, that symposium marked the beginning of the *public* debate on the economics pastoral.

The debate began in earnest even before the bishops gathered at Notre Dame. A week before the symposium, *Business Week* worried that the bishops were already leaning toward liberal political conclusions: "Based on the issues it will address, the experts who have been chosen to write position papers, and the makeup of the bishops' committee that will draft it, the final document could sound a lot like the 1984 Democratic Presidential platform." Conceding that the symposium would include many different points of view, *Business Week* nonetheless warned, "Few conservative economists have been invited, however."

Fortune magazine made the same point much less politely. Managing editor Daniel Seligman charged: "Continuing to act out the axiom that God intended them to be social planners, the bishops are once again on the secular stage and once again threatening to unclarify an issue." As for Archbishop Weakland's plan to delay his draft until after the election, Seligman guessed that the "real reason for the delay . . . is that the National Conference of Catholic Bishops does not wish to dramatize the fact that its economics are well to the left of every candidate you could name except maybe Jesse Jackson."

These criticisms appeared before the bishops had made any statement whatsoever. At Notre Dame the bishops' role was to listen rather than to speak. But the first public function of the Weakland committee revealed the depth of the controversy into which the bishops were heading.

The range of speakers at Notre Dame was wide, including former Secretaries of Labor (Ray Marshall) and Commerce (Peter Peterson), representatives from the AFL-CIO (Rudy Oswald) and General Motors (Marina von Neumann Whitman), and Catholic theologians who attacked (Joe Holland) and defended (Michael Novak) the U.S. economic system with equal vigor. The scope of the presentations was equally broad, ranging from specific econometric analysis to general theological inquiry. Ray Marshall produced a highly detailed argument in favor of a particular federal anti-poverty program (the Comprehensive Employment and Training, or CETA, program), while Joe Holland gave a very abstract analysis of "the spiritual exhaustion and social-ecological destruction flowing from absolutizing the mechanistic imagination."

Coming so soon after the vociferous debate on the "peace pastoral," the Notre Dame meeting held out the promise of another lively discussion on the bishops' new letter. Although the tone of the symposium was calm and scholarly, the participants' passions were obviously engaged. The *New York Times* reported that "the attempts at evenhandedness left some of the participants a little frustrated. 'I have a feeling we haven't captured the sense of urgency among the poor,' Bishop William K. Weigand of Salt Lake City said at one point." The bishops' senior staff member, Monsignor George Higgins, told a Catholic weekly that the new letter would be "far more controversial than the peace pastoral." And the *Los Angeles Times* agreed, citing a prediction that the economics statement "will make the anti-nuclear statement seem like a 'Sunday-school picnic' by comparison."

After the Notre Dame symposium, the Weakland committee resumed its private meetings, and for several months the debate over their forthcoming statement continued quietly. In an April speech to parish leaders from his own Milwaukee diocese, Archbishop Weakland deliberately downplayed the controversy. "A certain defensiveness seems to be arising on the part of some in the business community," he noted. Weakland cited two fears that he felt prompted this defensiveness, the fear that the letter would "somehow declare the free-market system as intrinsically evil" and "the fear that big business will be the whipping boy, the scapegoat." Neither fear was justified, he insisted: "The committee has certainly not approached the matter in this way, but has been, from my personal point of view, quite evenhanded."

Formation of the Lay Commission

But not everyone was reassured. One month later, a group of prominent Catholic laymen announced the formation of a "Lay Commission on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy." The group, chaired by former Treasury secretary William Simon, proposed to conduct its own hearings and issue its own "Letter of the Laity" on Catholicism and economics. Michael Novak of the American Enterprise Institute was the vice chairman and main spokesman; he was also to be the principal author of the group's statement. Other prominent members were former government officials Alexander Haig, Walter Hickel, Clare Boothe Luce, and Frank Shakespeare and corporate chief executives Robert Buckley of Allegheny International, William Ellinghaus of A.T.T., and J. Peter Grace of W. R. Grace. Inevitably,

the Lay Commission was viewed as a conservative response to the bishops' efforts.

Among the bishops and their staff, the appearance of the Lay Commission was greeted without enthusiasm. Speaking in New York, Bishop Francis Stafford of Memphis denounced the group for criticizing the bishops before they had even issued a statement. At a meeting of the Catholic Press Association, Archbishop Weakland complained that Catholic diocesan newspapers gave too much prominence to dissident groups; he wondered aloud how editors should handle groups that misrepresented Catholic social teachings to suit their own prejudices.

With the passage of time, however, the bishops' hostility to the Lay Commission abated. Simon and Novak led a delegation to visit Archbishop Weakland and assure him that their intentions were not confrontational. The Lay Commission invited bishops to attend their sessions. (None accepted.) Behind the scenes, members of the Lay Commission placed reassuring phone calls to friendly bishops. Gradually, the initial tension subsided. Archbishop Weakland said he would welcome the Lay Commission's input, although he pointedly remarked that the group had no mandate to speak on behalf of the American laity. "I call it the Simon-Novak Commission," he told *Business Week*.

During the summer of 1984, both the Weakland committee and the Lay Commission began drafting and circulating preliminary reports. Each group kept its project closely guarded, avoiding public speculation about its content. Members of the Lay Commission visited members of the bishops' staff, and vice versa, with each trying—unsuccessfully—to get some hints of what the other's document might say.

Among the sensitive issues that commission members faced was the timing of their report. If they released their document before Election Day, they could be charged with pursuing political motives. But the bishops planned to issue *their* letter immediately after the election. And if the Lay Commission's letter appeared after the bishops' document became public, the Simon-Novak group would be perceived as attempting to answer the bishops. The Lay Commission insisted that its task was not to react, but to make an independent and complementary statement.

The Letters Appear

On November 7, 1984, one day after the election, the Lay Commission released its statement. By that time the USCC had already mailed

copies of the Weakland committee's first draft to all the American bishops. But the bishops' document was not available to the press until November 9, and not formally unveiled until the bishops began their annual meeting on November 11.

The bishops' first draft and the Lay Commission's statement were not truly comparable documents. The Simon-Novak report, entitled "Toward the Future," was a finished product; the group had no plans to follow up with any future publications. And of course the Lay Commission had no formal constituency; the members who signed the report spoke only for themselves. Nevertheless, the media gave it an unprecedented amount of attention. After the bishops released their first draft, reporters gave roughly equal coverage to both.

But while the Lay Commission was finishing its major work, the Weakland committee was only beginning. At the November 1984 meeting, the NCCB voted overwhelmingly in favor of the basic direction of the drafting committee's work. Several bishops offered suggestions, and a few expressed reservations about tone, but the consensus clearly supported the effort. So the drafting committee moved into the second phase of its work: collecting comments and critiques, and preparing a second draft.

In addition to their annual business meeting in November, the American bishops also held a less formal meeting in June 1985 on the secluded campus of St. John's College in Collegeville, Minnesota, to share thoughts on general questions confronting the Church. Archbishop Weakland had hoped to prepare the second draft in time for discussion at the Collegeville meeting, with a third and final draft ready for approval at the November 1985 meeting. But the overwhelming response to the first draft made that schedule unrealistic. Weakland requested and was granted an extension. The new schedule called for presenting a second draft at the November 1985 meeting and preparing the final document for a November 1986 vote.

The volume of response to the first draft was impressive. Reporting to the other bishops at Collegeville, Archbishop Weakland tallied the responses that his committee had already received: from bishops and their various diocesan panels, 109 replies; from Catholic organizations and institutions, 88; from religious orders, 32; from secular institutions and organizations, 38; from academics, 44; from international sources, 30; from interfaith and ecumenical groups, 14; and from ordinary individuals, over 1,000. Altogether, the bishops already had more than 10,000 pages of response, and the flood was continuing. The commit-

tee promised to sift through the responses, and amend the draft as necessary.

The critiques of the bishops' first draft, and the rebuttals supplied by supporters of the Weakland committee, are the subject of the next chapter. The second draft of the pastoral was released in October 1985, when the bulk of this study had already been completed. Although some significant changes were made in the new draft, the basic direction of the document remains the same.

CHAPTER THREE

What the Bishops Heard

NEAR THE END OF their pastoral letter on nuclear weapons, the American bishops made a simple statement of their role in the public debate:

> Why do we address these matters fraught with such complexity, controversy and passion? We speak as pastors, not politicians. We are teachers, not technicians. We cannot avoid our responsibility to lift up the moral dimensions of the choices before our world and nation.

When the first draft of the economics pastoral was published, in November 1984, Archbishop Rembert Weakland emphasized the same point. "The letter is not a political instrument of either the Democratic or Republican Party," Weakland told *Business Week*. "It is not the Church's role to come up with economic theories and solutions or take partisan positions, but the Church has to be concerned about how economic issues affect the lives of the people. Not to do that would be to shirk what religion is all about."

Taking the bishops at their word, a fair critique of their decision-making process must ask whether the preparation of the pastoral letter encourages a balanced, pastoral approach. Do the bishops attempt to take into account the views of all loyal Catholics? Do they appraise technical questions accurately? Do they listen to respectful criticisms? If so, the bishops may be faithfully exercising their role as moral leaders. If not, the pastoral letters are moving the bishops into the alien realm of partisan politics.

Long before the first draft of the economics pastoral appeared, the bishops and their staff were sending out conflicting signals about the political impact of their arguments. Only a few months after Monsignor George Higgins had told the Catholic weekly newspaper *Our Sunday Visitor* that the document would be "far more controversial than

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the peace pastoral," he assured *Business Week* that even the Lay Commission would be pleased with the first draft. "I have the feeling that Michael Novak is going to have a hard time finding anything that he basically disagrees with," claimed Higgins.

Archbishop Weakland also dropped ambiguous hints. "Catholic social teaching, of course, is not written out of a party-platform mentality," he assured an audience in April 1983. "It seems evident to me that no political party today will lay claim to the whole of Catholic social teaching." Yet in the same address he affirmed the need for strong government involvement in the economy and spoke of government economic planning as a sheer necessity. Perhaps the Archbishop did not realize just how sensitive such statements had become at a time when the call for government planning was a key feature of Democratic party rhetoric.

'A Certain Defensiveness'

As noted earlier, in April 1983 Archbishop Weakland remarked that "a certain defensiveness seems to be arising on the part of some in the business community" about the economics pastoral. If a pastoral letter poses the danger of alienating one group of individuals, bishops must proceed carefully. A bishop is pastor to *all* the people in his diocese. Ordinarily his role as spiritual leader is to unite rather than to divide. At times, to be sure, bishops are called upon to defend a particular Catholic doctrine against popular misinterpretations; they then must side with one group against another. But if Catholic doctrine is not in jeopardy, bishops must assiduously avoid fostering dissension among Catholics.

In an official warning about the dangers of "liberation theology," issued by the Vatican's top doctrinal office in 1984, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger made a related point about the role of church leaders. True Christianity, Ratzinger pointed out, can never involve siding with one class against another within society. The Catholic Church is deeply committed to the welfare of the poor, but its concern for the poor does not necessarily imply a hostile attitude toward the non-poor. Rich people too need the Church's help to attain salvation.

Archbishop Weakland and his fellow members of the bishops' drafting committee clearly did not intend to isolate the business community from their discussions. On the contrary, the committee heard formal testimony from at least fifteen corporate executives, and Archbishop

Weakland (among others) made numerous appearances before audiences of businessmen. After the release of the first draft, Archbishop (now Cardinal) John J. O'Connor of New York reacted with surprise to the suggestion that the drafting committee had ignored some critics. As a guest on William Buckley's *Firing Line* television program, O'Connor said, "I've had nothing but evidence of deep sincerity about trying to get responses from every spectrum of society."

The breadth of the Weakland committee's research is impressive. Over 100 witnesses appeared before the bishops, representing a bewildering variety of organizations and perspectives. The most visible critic of the pastoral letter, Michael Novak, was given three opportunities to make his case to the committee even before he began drafting the Lay Commission's report.

Conspicuous Absences

Yet there were gaps in the bishops' coverage. Among the dozens of economists and political scientists who presented statements at the committee's "hearings," only one was widely known for conservative views (Herbert Stein, the chairman of the Council of Economic Advisors under Presidents Nixon and Ford). Despite the passionate debate then raging over "supply-side" economics, the bishops did not hear any representative of that school of thought.

When the first draft appeared, the gap in the bishops' research became evident. The draft had 244 footnotes, citing scores of economic studies; yet only *one* conservative economist was cited, and even that citation was somewhat odd. In calling for a lower rate of unemployment, the draft conceded that many economists "argue that the minimum level of unemployment that can be achieved has risen significantly during recent decades." The footnote specified that Milton Friedman made this point in his speech accepting the Nobel Prize. But the point is hardly representative of the main thrust of Friedman's work, which centers on government monetary policy. The draft makes no mention of Friedman's better known work, nor is any other conservative economist cited at all.

In the midst of the committee's deliberations, a new book on government welfare policy rocked the debate on domestic social policy. Charles Murray argued in *Losing Ground* that government programs to alleviate poverty have actually *aggravated* the problem. Conservative social scientists had eagerly awaited the publication of *Losing*

Ground; the general lines of Murray's analysis were well known, and shorter statements of his thesis had appeared before publication of the book late in 1984. Since the bishops' most dramatic arguments centered precisely on the government's role in fighting poverty, Murray's thesis was an essential part of the background. But the bishops' committee apparently ignored it.

Similarly, the Weakland committee's first draft failed to mention the views of many other conservative scholars whose work is material to the bishops' argument. Among them: on the impact of race on poverty, Thomas Sowell; on the "feminization of poverty," George Gilder—or for that matter, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, the author of the seminal work on that subject; on international development, Lord Peter Bauer.

Even more remarkably, the first draft pays no attention to the economic problems that preoccupy conservative theorists, such as inflation, taxation, and the need to curtail government spending. In examining the causes of poverty, the bishops do not mention that for many people—particularly those living on fixed incomes—inflation redoubles the difficulty of making ends meet. While assessing the plight of the American family, they do not mention that high rates of taxation add to the burden. And in calling for major new efforts to combat poverty and unemployment, they do not mention that new bursts of government spending could imperil the entire structure of American economic life.

At times, the committee's rush toward liberal economic principles leads to outright errors. "The top 5 per cent of American families own almost 43 per cent of the net wealth in the nation," the draft claims. But the supporting footnote points out: "Not incorporated in the estimates are the value of durable goods, automobiles, and the value of small businesses and private practices. The value of homes and the liability of home mortgages are also excluded." In other words, the statistics used measure a family's liquid assets—money in the bank, stock portfolios, and similar financial instruments. That wealthy people have more money in the bank is a truism; to exclude homes, automobiles, and small businesses from the definition of "family net wealth" is to distort the economic picture severely.

An Ideological Predisposition

After making such obviously sincere and ambitious efforts to hear from every interested party, why did the Weakland committee produce

such a biased perspective? At a conference in Detroit sponsored by the American Catholic Conference in May 1985, theologian Thomas Langan of the University of Toronto attempted an explanation. Langan pointed out that "the Canadian bishops have not used such a process of broad consultation . . . and yet have come up with positions cut from the same predictable cloth," and "many of the USCC's own statements which were not preceded by any such wide consultation were just as predictable. The problem, Langan concludes, "obviously does not lie in the process of wide consultation as such." Rather, Langan concludes, the problem lies in an ideological predisposition that favors certain arguments and finds others irrelevant.

Archbishop Weakland had promised that his committee would not produce a partisan document. But when the draft appeared, the bishops' policy prescriptions contrasted sharply with those of the Reagan administration and corresponded closely to those of the most liberal Democratic activists. After assuring *Business Week* that the committee recognized the need to protect private property, Weakland introduced a document that condemned current inequalities in the distribution of wealth. After pronouncing itself uncertain about the virtues of government economic planning, the committee endorsed a greater degree of just such planning.

Political conservatives were naturally unhappy with the bishops' first draft. But the political bias of the document was apparent to others as well. The *New Republic*'s Charles Krauthammer charged that the bishops were calling for "repeal of the paradoxes of economic life, and for enactment of a spent political agenda." Writing in the Jesuit magazine *America*, Joseph Califano, a man with impeccably liberal credentials, complained that the draft sounded like one of his own old political position papers; New York's Governor Mario Cuomo echoed that criticism.

Rejecting the Criticism

Six months after the appearance of the draft, Archbishop Weakland spoke to an audience at Georgetown University about the reaction. Besides criticisms of the letter's tone and style, he found that critics could be divided into two groups. One group rejected Catholic social teaching and thus rejected the bishops' extrapolations from those teachings. The other group—here Weakland specifically mentioned Califano and Cuomo—accepted Catholic teachings, found fault with

the draft's conclusions, but offered no alternatives. Archbishop Weakland did not acknowledge the existence of any critics who accept Catholic teachings, reject the draft's conclusions, and offer plausible alternatives. In fact, in three different summaries of the reactions to the first draft—in the Georgetown speech and in two subsequent reports to his fellow bishops—Weakland never acknowledged the validity of any criticism leveled against the substance of the draft.

Is it possible to accept the whole corpus of Catholic social teaching and still reach political conclusions different from those presented in the first draft? In the past, American prelates have certainly thought so. In the 1960 Annual Statement of the American Hierarchy, the leadership of the bishops' conference hammered home the need to base economic growth on a sense of personal responsibility. One section seems clearly to point in an opposite direction from the Weakland committee's draft:

> Although personal responsibility and initiative have been our national characteristics, explaining in large measure our country's progress in human welfare, yet pressures are growing for a constantly greater reliance on the collectivity rather than on the individual. An inordinate demand for benefits, most easily secured by the pressures of organization, has led an ever-growing number of our people to relinquish their rights and abdicate their responsibilities.

Of course, the American economic scene has changed a great deal since 1960. But a major feature of that change has been the shift toward *greater* governmental responsibility for the poor; the anti-poverty program did not exist in 1960. By the same logic, the need for personal responsibility would seem to be even greater today. The Weakland committee, while certainly not denying that need, chose to emphasize a very different set of political postulates.

Catholic social thought, too, has changed considerably since the American bishops issued their 1960 statement. The Second Vatican Council added an entirely new dimension to the Church's perception of social work, and encyclicals by Popes John XXIII, Paul VI, and John Paul II have underlined the need for Catholic action against social injustices. Still, the fundamental teachings of the Church do not vary over time. And if the NCCB is a legitimate interpreter of Catholic social teaching today, so was the bishops' conference of 1960.

Catholic social teachings can be interpreted in many different ways. The Weakland committee chose one interpretation, apparently without

acknowledging that valid alternatives could exist. As a result, the first draft unnecessarily divides the loyal members of the Catholic Church. And the evident partisan bias renders it unlikely that the bishops' suggestions will gain a strong political following.

Perhaps the most severe indictment of the Weakland committee's first draft came in the *Religion and Society Report* (March 1985), an ecumenical newsletter edited by Lutheran scholar Richard John Neuhaus. After surveying dozens of individual and organizational reactions to the draft, the newsletter concluded:

> The astonishing thing is that the bishops, or at least some of them, seem to believe that their draft can be the basis of a consensus within American society. In introducing the draft, Archbishop Weakland and others came back again and again to their hope that they were contributing to "a new national consensus." At the same time, the draft says the bishops are setting forth a "prophetic" position. This would be something truly new in human history: prophecy by consensus, or a consensus in support of the prophetic. In truth, if prophetic means no more than being marginal, the bishops' draft is prophetic. There is no constituency, not even on the left of the Democratic party, for the policy directions espoused by the bishops.

If the bishops' pastoral letters go beyond the dictates of Catholic social teaching, and beyond the broad American political consensus, what is the force behind them? To answer this question requires an examination of the political attitudes of the bishops who draft the pastoral letters and, more important, the members of the staff.

CHAPTER FOUR

Balance or Bias?

JOURNALISTIC ACCOUNTS of the bishops' work routinely refer to "the pastoral letter of the American bishops." But until November 1986, when the full membership of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops is scheduled to approve a final draft, there is no pastoral letter on the U.S. economy. The document currently in circulation is not a pastoral letter but a draft. And that document has been produced, not by the American bishops, but by a committee of five bishops and their chosen staff assistants.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that they hold no formal authority, the early drafts of the pastoral letter have an enormous impact. Like congressional bills, the bishops' pastoral letters pass through several stages of media coverage. When the proposal is first introduced, media accounts focus on the ideas underlying the measure. But as debate on the topic continues, the novelty of the ideas diminishes, and the lure of the political battle increases. In the first stage of discussion, eager reporters analyze opposing arguments and possible amendments. Later, the nuances of argument are lost in the rush to count votes.

Thus during the bishops' discussion of nuclear weapons, it was the second draft of the pastoral that received the most critical scrutiny. When the third draft appeared, reporters noticed several crucial changes in wording that had apparently moderated the impact of the pastoral. But by the time the bishops gathered in Chicago for their final discussion and vote, public interest in the debate had passed its peak. Journalists faithfully recorded the bishops' final overwhelming approval of the pastoral letter, but at least in the secular media, the actual wording of the final product received far less attention than the unofficial suggestions contained in the second draft.

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Not surprisingly, many observers assumed that the highly visible second draft of the peace pastoral was an official statement by the bishops' conference. That draft, with its severe criticism of the Reagan administration's defense policies, constituted a major news story. Media reports naturally emphasized the differences between the draft document and the Administration's announced policies, reinforcing the impression that the bishops had already delivered their indictment. So while the bishops continued to ponder—and eventually to soften—their criticisms, the initial impact could not be erased.

The Committee's Influence

By preparing a text for discussion, the drafting committee exerts an obvious influence over what the bishops' document will say. Less obvious but perhaps equally important is the committee's influence over what the general public *thinks* the bishops have said. The two—the actual content of the document, and the public perception of the pastoral message—are morally quite different.

Once again, the peace pastoral provides a case in point. Since the debate over that letter coincided with a national debate over the nuclear freeze movement, reporters gravitated toward an assumption that the bishops were endorsing the freeze. (Dozens of American bishops *did* endorse the freeze, independently of their work on the pastoral letter.) The official pastoral letter, when it appeared, stopped short of any such endorsement; indeed, a footnote explicitly cautioned that the NCCB did *not* intend to endorse any specific political proposal. Yet the overwhelming impression among American observers was that the bishops wanted to make just such an endorsement. The ordinary American could hardly be blamed for drawing that conclusion: when asked by reporters if it would be fair to interpret the letter as favoring a freeze, NCCB president John Roach answered with an unequivocal "yes." As president of the conference, Archbishop Roach held considerable authority as an interpreter of the bishops' message.

Earlier in the process, when drafts of the pastoral letter appeared, reporters naturally turned to members of the drafting committee for comments and clarifications. The chairman of that committee, Cardinal Bernardin, made dozens of public appearances before both Catholic and secular audiences. Archbishop Weakland is now equally active on behalf of his own committee. Clearly Weakland's public speeches

are his own responsibility; they do not carry the *imprimatur* of the bishops' conference. Still, they inevitably draw heavy media coverage and help to shape the public understanding of the bishops' message.

The Influence of Staff

Since bishops are not always available for a timely comment, reporters rely heavily on the bishops' staff for suggestions on which issues might be most newsworthy and for speculation on what future drafts might contain. The USCC staff members draft press releases, publicly describe the documents, and routinely answer journalists' inquiries. And since relatively few Americans will read through a 20,000-word document, the bishops must rely on their staff, working through the media, to distill and disseminate the message. If the staff harbors any bias of its own, that bias will become a part of the overall message, effectively inseparable from the bishops' actual stance.

Certainly the American bishops cannot be blamed for quirks in media coverage. Nevertheless, if early drafts can have a disproportionate impact, the role of the drafting committee and its staff is doubly important. And as long as most Americans learn about the bishops' work through media accounts, staff aides will have the opportunity to color those accounts with their own personal views. The selection of the bishops' drafting committee, and their selection of a staff, then, are crucial steps in the production of the pastoral letter.

The first and most important step in the formation of a drafting commitee is the selection of a committee chairman. As we have seen, the president of the NCCB takes that step, and in 1980 it was Archbishop John Roach of St. Paul, Minnesota, who appointed Archbishop Weakland to his post. Roach was an energetic, forceful leader who made no effort to conceal his own political sympathies. Later in his term as president, he would issue a series of attacks on the social policies of the Reagan administration. When Roach chose Weakland, Ronald Reagan was only beginning to savor his first electoral victory. But Archbishop Roach could easily have foreseen the confrontation that would develop.

When Roach's term as president expired, the NCCB members elected the former vice president, Bishop James Malone of Youngstown, Ohio, to succeed him. Bishop Malone, too, has been active in the bishops' political debates. During the debate over the "peace pastoral," he argued forcefully for an explicit endorsement of the nuclear

freeze. Thus far in his term as NCCB president, he has forcefully defended the bishops' willingness to speak out on political issues. His most controversial moment came in April 1984, when President Reagan invited several of the nation's most prominent Catholic bishops to the White House for briefings and discussion. After a cordial session, during which Reagan concentrated on abortion, Bishop Malone met waiting reporters with a blistering prepared attack on the Reagan administration's foreign policy. To date, however, Bishop Malone has had relatively little opportunity to shape the debate on the economics pastoral.

The Bishops' Committee

Archbishop Rembert Weakland, too, is no stranger to controversy. His outspoken views on topics as diverse as nuclear weapons policy, homosexuality, economics, and the role of women in the Church have often put him at odds with more traditional bishops, and with Pope John Paul II. Within his own archdiocese (Milwaukee), the parochial schools' sex-education program has provoked a furious reaction among conservative Catholic parents. A Benedictine monk with a scholarly background in liturgical music, Archbishop Weakland came to his task with no training in economics.

Of the four other bishops on the drafting committee, Auxiliary Bishop Peter Rosazza of Hartford has been the most active in political debates. Like Weakland, Rosazza has been an outspoken critic of nuclear deterrence policy. During the 1984 presidential campaign, when the Democratic vice-presidential nominee became embroiled in a dispute over abortion with New York's Archbishop O'Connor, Rosazza joined twenty-two other bishops in a public statement that, in effect, rebuked O'Connor and insisted that nuclear strategy was as important a campaign issue as abortion. And as mentioned it was Bishop Rosazza who, feeling that the NCCB criticism of Marxism ought to be balanced, called for a pastoral letter on capitalism.

When Bishop George Speltz of St. Cloud, Minnesota, and Bishop William Weigand of Salt Lake City joined the drafting committee, neither had a reputation for political activism. Speltz was among the Midwestern bishops who signed a statement calling for more federal aid to farmers; Weigand has been critical of the Reagan administration's policies toward Latin America. Both had supported the nuclear freeze. But neither Speltz nor Weigand has been particularly outspoken on

these issues. Both could probably be classified somewhere in the political midstream of the American hierarchy.

During the development of the "peace pastoral," Cardinal Bernardin's committee often split along ideological lines, with one bishop advocating a stern condemnation of American nuclear strategy, while another pressed for a more moderate statement. The "conservative" position was represented by Cardinal John O'Connor of New York (then an auxiliary bishop working as a military vicar), a career military chaplain who had earned the rank of admiral in the Navy, and had written extensively on defense. Auxiliary Bishop Thomas Gumbleton of Detroit, the American president of the pacifist-oriented group *Pax Christi*, represented the "liberal" stance. Through those two bishops, Catholic activists of both conservative and liberal sympathies believed that they were heard within the drafting committee.

Archbishop Weakland's committee has no such balance. Bishop Rosazza—and Weakland himself—can be relied upon to represent the views of more liberal Catholics. But no member appears to assume the role that O'Connor had performed. Archbishop Donnellan of Atlanta, the fifth member of the drafting committee, told *Business Week*, "If you want a token conservative, I'm it." But unlike O'Connor, who had appeared regularly before "conservative" audiences, Donnellan had no history of speaking up for conservative ideas.

None of the bishops on the drafting committee has any academic training in economics. But the Weakland panel quickly added some economic expertise. *Ad hoc* committees generally include two "consultants," one to represent the orders of priests and monks within the United States, another to represent women's religious orders. The two consultants chosen for the Weakland committee were the Rev. Michael Lavelle, a Jesuit economist trained at M.I.T., and Sister Margaret Cahill, a Dominican economist—neither notable for conservative economic analyses.

The Staff

To work on the all-important details of the draft, the Weakland committee enlisted four USCC staff members: the Rev. J. Bryan Hehir, Ronald Krietemeyer, Monsignor George Higgins, and Thomas Quigley.

1. The name of *J. Bryan Hehir* is familiar to anyone who follows the bishops' political activities. A Harvard-trained political scientist,

Father Hehir heads the USCC's Office of Social Development and World Peace. Thus he is the leading spokesman for the bishops' conference on political issues. Although he describes himself as a "radical centrist," most political analysts would place Hehir well to the left of center on the political spectrum. In 1983, he received the prestigious Letelier award, the top annual honor accorded by the nation's most prominent left-wing think tank, the Institute for Policy Studies.

Father Hehir's professional specialty is not economics but international affairs, particularly defense strategy. He has published numerous journal articles on nuclear weaponry and lectures regularly on the peace pastoral. Indeed, Hehir is widely recognized as the principal author of that pastoral, although the bishops routinely deny that any one person was the author. Speaking as the bishops' representative in congressional testimony, Hehir has harshly criticized American policies in Central America. In a 1984 appearance before a congressional committee, when Representative Henry Hyde pressed him to denounce Marxism as incompatible with Christianity, Father Hehir demurred.

Despite his reputation as the bishops' primary political advisor, ever, Father Hehir is probably not the prime mover on the staff of the Weakland committee. In recent months he has worked only part-time at the USCC while also pursuing a busy schedule as a lecturer and scholar at Georgetown University's Kennedy Institute.

2. *Ronald Krietemeyer* is head of the USCC Office of Domestic Social Development and thus technically the leading staff person on the bishops' drafting committee. In 1984 a Georgetown University student asked Krietemeyer to comment on some Catholic activist groups about which the student was writing his thesis. Krietemeyer did not see conservative activists as pursuing a genuinely Catholic viewpoint. "It's more of just putting a Catholic name on . . . the conservative political trend," he claimed. Krietemeyer saw his own work as continuing a "progressive" political tradition that stretched back to the origins of the USCC and beyond.

3. *Monsignor George Higgins*, now enjoying an extraordinarily active semi-retirement at Catholic University, has been a mainstay on the bishops' staff for over a generation. Higgins readily sympathizes with liberal political causes. He has been associated with Democratic politicians since the New Deal, and his long involvement with the Ameri-

can labor movement has earned him the sobriquet "the labor priest." Ironically, Monsignor Higgins is probably more conservative politically than anyone else on the Weakland committee staff.

4. Bryan Hehir and Ronald Krietemeyer are natural appointments to the Weakland committee by virtue of their positions in the USCC, and Monsignor Higgins's enormous experience makes his selection equally natural. But the assignment of *Thomas Quigley* to the team is more difficult to understand. Quigley is the USCC's advisor on Latin America; he has no direct involvement with domestic economic issues. Presumably he was added to the committee's staff to participate in the discussion of how American economic policies affect poverty in Latin America.

If Quigley's presence on the drafting committee is somewhat mysterious, his political ideas are well known. He has been a highly vocal critic of U.S. policies toward Central America, and of multinational corporations active in that region. He is a member of the steering committee of the Religious Task Force on Central America, which has sided publicly with Nicaragua's Marxist-Leninist regime in its conflict with the nation's Catholic hierarchy, led by Cardinal Obando y Bravo.

Outside Advisors

As chief professional consultant to the drafting committee, Archbishop Weakland made a natural choice: the head of the economics department at America's best-known Catholic university. *Charles Wilber* of Notre Dame cannot be classified as either an orthodox liberal or an orthodox conservative. "Liberalism turns to government, and conservatism to corporations, to solve problems," Wilber mentioned to *Notre Dame Magazine* in December 1980. Rejecting both approaches, and citing the need to rebuild the moral basis for economic stewardship, Wilber prescribed a combination of government planning, decentralized decision-making, and corporate democracy as a solution to the economic woes he foresaw for the 1980s.

Along with Wilber, *Donald Warwick* of Harvard University joined the staff to lend his expertise on international economic issues. Unlike Wilber, whose published work is distinctively flavored by Catholic social thought, Warwick has concentrated on the relatively narrow question of how international development programs should be administered, and especially how population-planning programs can be introduced in Third World countries. If Warwick's attitudes toward

population planning are affected by the Catholic prohibition on artificial contraception, that influence cannot be detected in his books.

Until the bishops reveal the internal workings of their drafting committees, it will be impossible to gauge the influence that Wilber and Warwick have had on the committee's work. However, one other consultant has had a clearly discernible impact on the bishops' first draft: a Jesuit theologian named *David Hollenbach*.

When the Weakland committee first met to hear testimony, in November 1981, Father Hollenbach and Michael Novak were among the witnesses. Two years later, when the bishops participated in the Notre Dame symposium, both men were again featured speakers. On both occasions, Novak strenuously urged the bishops to add another, more conservative member to their team of consultants. As things stood, Novak argued, the committee had no one to represent conservative economic views; inevitably the bishops would be criticized for failing to explore conservative ideas. After the Notre Dame meeting the committee did add a new consultant: Hollenbach. The choice certainly did not eliminate Novak's objection.

In his presentation at Notre Dame, Hollenbach impressed the listening bishops with several arguments. He pointed out that after each recent American economic recession, the recovery has left unemployment rates higher than they were before the cycle began. He argued that many Americans suffering from unemployment and poverty become "marginalized" so that they do not enjoy the benefits of full participation in society. And he claimed that American political society has failed to ensure economic "rights" (such as the right to employment) as adequately as the Bill of Rights protects political and civil liberties. Basing his notion of economic justice on the theories of John Rawls, Father Hollenbach urged the bishops to make a strong case for full employment.

Each one of Hollenbach's key arguments found a major place in the bishops' first draft. The concept of "marginalization," the call for recognition of economic "rights," and the demand for action against unemployment were all crucial aspects of the overall argument which the bishops presented.

Clearly, the staff of the Weakland committee is politically tilted to the left of center. Indeed, in the most comprehensive available study of the USCC bureaucracy (*The Pursuit of a Just Social Order*, published by the Ethics and Public Policy Center in 1982), Brian Benestad

has demonstrated that the bishops' staff as a whole shows "no political diversity." But of course the final responsibility for the pastoral letter rests with the bishops themselves.

The Bishops' Involvement

Once a draft of the pastoral letter is completed, the influence of the drafting committee diminishes. The document must win the approval of the whole body of American bishops before it becomes an official pastoral letter. But bishops have many demands on their time, and for most prelates the study of detailed political statements is not a matter of high priority. In an effort to find out how many bishops inspect their committee's work with a critical eye, journalist Dinesh D'Souza interviewed a random sampling of American bishops, questioning them about details of the pastoral letter on nuclear weapons and the draft on economics. The answers, published in the Fall 1985 issue of *Policy Review*, reveal an enormous gap between the specific policy options suggested in the pastoral letters and the general understanding of the average prelate.

One of D'Souza's questions involved marginal tax rates. "Marginal what? This is where I'm way over my head," confessed Chicago's Auxiliary Bishop Nevin Hayes. "Cutting marginal tax rates? I'm not sure what that means," echoed Bishop Maurice Dingman of Des Moines. Bishop Daniel Hart of Boston, asked what percentage of the national budget goes into military spending, responded, "I won't give figures, because I just don't know." And remarkably, D'Souza reports: "Hartford Bishop Peter Rosazza . . . has 'no idea' how much the United States spends on defense." If most bishops rely on the USCC staff to provide a balanced political view, at least the bishops on the drafting committee might develop an expertise in the area. Yet in his critical review of the bishops' pastoral letters, Dinesh D'Souza levels a disturbing charge:

> Individual bishops no doubt share the sentiments of concern for the poor and horror of war that underlie these pastorals, but they are not the ones who come up with the analysis or the specific recommendations. Martin McLaughlin, a former official at the Agency for International Development, who is actively involved in the economics pastoral, says that even the bishops delegated to the pastoral committees "rewrite very few sentences" that the USCC staff draws up; only "if they egregiously do not like something, they change it."

Even when a controversial pastoral letter comes before the NCCB for a final vote, most bishops stay out of the discussion. Surely no other recent episcopal statement produced as much debate as the 1983 pastoral, "The Challenge of Peace." After two years of intense public argument on the subject, no bishop could have avoided the issue. Yet when the NCCB met in May 1983 for a final debate and vote, fewer than thirty bishops—from among roughly 300 in attendance—made any comments whatsoever during the three-day meeting.

Implementing the Pastoral

Once the bishops approve a pastoral letter, they again turn to their staff to "implement" its teachings. For months, one USCC staff member worked full time to circulate information about the peace pastoral, and help local Catholic groups design their own implementation programs. The USCC published a newsletter listing hundreds of books, pamphlets, videotapes, and other materials designed to promulgate the bishops' message.

Again, this "implementation" of the pastoral letter gives wide discretionary powers to the bishops' staff. The process of explaining, clarifying, and summarizing the pastoral letter allows ample room for interpretation. And many of the individuals and organizations who lobbied the bishops most ardently on behalf of a particular viewpoint seize the opportunity to press that viewpoint through the "implementation" process. In a soon to be published study, Matthew Murphy has demonstrated that many of the most popular educational materials associated with the peace pastoral actually *contradict* key portions of the bishops' statement.

If Archbishop Weakland has his way, the implementation of the economics pastoral will be an even more elaborate undertaking. In his report to the bishops' June 1985 Collegeville meeting, Weakland stressed "the need for a certain and sure commitment on the part of all of us toward implementation." In his view, the pastoral should be used in parochial schools as a part of the regular curriculum; business and labor leaders should be brought into the effort; the USCC should sponsor research on the economic problems highlighted by the pastoral; and the message of the economics pastoral should be carefully correlated with the previous message of "The Challenge of Peace" to emphasize "the relationship between the militarization of our culture and the economic situation of the more deprived."

Do the bishops contemplate an active lobbying campaign on behalf of the policies proposed in their document? Archbishop Weakland did not duck the question but answered it with a question of his own: "Such implementation falls primarily into the realm of the political and lies especially within the competency of our lay people. How help them keep ethical and biblical perspectives before them as they seek to make the kinds of decisions that will put the principles of this document into practice?" Archbishop Weakland promised to make explicit suggestions about implementation in the text of the second draft.

CHAPTER FIVE

Levels of Authority

BARRING UNFORESEEN DEVELOPMENTS, the NCCB will issue a pastoral letter on economics in November 1986. Now or then, these questions must be addressed: Are the bishops speaking on behalf of all Catholic America? Are their judgments definitive? Will the pastoral letter become an official part of church teaching? Must all loyal Catholics accept the bishops' lead?

If the bishops' final document resembles the first draft, the answer to those questions will be no. Every conscientious Catholic must pay careful attention to the voice of his pastors. But a pastoral letter that delves into such minute political detail cannot be authoritative.

In the introduction to the first draft, the Weakland committee explains the first of several reasons why the bishops' political views lack authority. The basic principles of Catholic social teaching are not in dispute, at least among loyal members of the Catholic community. But the application of those principles to concrete economic situations involves a number of difficult practical judgments.

> Therefore we appeal to many sources of analysis and judgment which are not strictly religious or theological. In doing so we necessarily have to make judgments about which philosophical frameworks, economic theories, and explanations of particular economic problems are more rationally defensible. We are convinced that these judgments will stand up to public scrutiny, though we acknowledge that persons of good will may in some cases reach differing conclusions.

In the peace pastoral, too, the bishops recognize that their judgments on practical issues are not authoritative. Indeed, that pastoral letter contains a disclaimer at the outset, alerting readers to the various "levels of authority" that apply to different statements within the document.

Unfortunately, the bishops do not specify exactly which arguments are authoritative, and which are open to dispute.

When the NCCB met in Chicago in 1983 to approve the peace pastoral, one prelate asked that special attention be devoted to clarifying this vital issue. His colleagues overwhelmingly agreed with his premise—that the dividing line was very vague—but rejected his proposal for further discussion. Thus the confusion over authority in the "peace pastoral" can only be regarded as deliberate.

Unless readers have a clear idea of which statements are authoritative, they cannot separate the statements that convey immutable Catholic doctrine from those that convey merely the bishops' political preferences. And since the statements most widely publicized through the secular media are those with the most immediate political impact, the effect of this confusion is to draw attention away from the bishops' most authoritative statements.

Three Modes for Episcopal Statements

Bishops can speak on public issues in three different modes, each at a different level of authority: as evangelists, proclaiming the essential truths of the faith; as teachers, explaining the traditions of Catholic social thought; or as church leaders, addressing specific questions of public policy.

As evangelists, the bishops carry the full authority of their position in the Church. When the bishops define a dogma, such as the doctrine of the Trinity, their authority is final, and all loyal Catholics acknowledge it. Similarly, when the bishops pronounce a final judgment on ethical questions, their authority is unchallenged. For instance, the bishops have established beyond question that the Church unalterably opposes abortion.

As the primary teachers within the Catholic Church, the bishops also have the responsibility to promote the ideals of Catholic social thought. In the realm of economics, for example, the Church has consistently argued that workers should be paid a "family wage"—an amount sufficient for one worker to support his family. Naturally, such a standard requires some interpretation; the Church leaves ample room for debate. (What, in dollars and cents, constitutes a "family wage"? And who is responsible for assuring that workers receive it?) So while the bishops are the foremost authorities in promoting the Catholic social teachings, their pronouncements are not definitive.

When they speak as church leaders addressing questions of public policy, however, the bishops cannot claim any special authority. Individual Catholics are expected to respect their leaders and to take their thoughts seriously. But if the bishops' arguments are not convincing, individual Catholics are free to disagree.

In the eyes of the Catholic believer, then, bishops speak authoritatively when they speak on theological and ethical questions—questions involving the meaning of Catholic "faith and morals." When they address economic matters, they are probably more fallible than ordinary economic analysts—who are very fallible indeed. So when they base their policy prescriptions on their own economic analysis, the bishops cannot claim the mantle of church authority. And if they base their prescriptions on the views of some *other* economic analyst, their view is no more authoritative than that of the economist who instructs them. Over the course of time, most economic theories are discarded. The bishops' economic theories and the specific policy recommendations that derive from them can hardly be relied upon.

The Role of the Laity

But the question of the bishops' authority has deeper roots. The theological vision of Catholicism entails a division of labor among communicants. Bishops, by virtue of their ordination and consecration, have a special role, and are fortified by the Holy Spirit with a corresponding grace. Thus the bishop is regarded as an authority on theological issues not because of his intellect but because his judgments are guided by the Spirit.

The Catholic laity, too, has a special role in the work of the Church; and laymen too enjoy a special grace corresponding to their work. The Second Vatican Council emphasized that the Church has entered "the age of the laity," and called for a greater emphasis on the work of ordinary Catholic men and women outside the clergy. What is the nature of that work? Quoting from the crucial document of Vatican II, Pope John Paul II explained the role of the laity in his 1979 address in New York's Yankee Stadium:

> It is principally the task of lay people to put [Catholic social teachings] into practice in concrete projects, to define priorities and to develop models that are suitable for promoting man's real good. The Second Vatican Council's Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* tells us, "Let the lay people not imagine that their pastors are always

such experts, that to every problem which arises, however complicated, they can readily give a concrete solution, or even that such is their mission. Rather, enlightened by Christian wisdom and giving close attention to the teaching authority of the Church, let the lay people assume their own distinctive role."

The task of applying Catholic teachings to concrete social problems—of devising practical political options—belongs to the laity. When bishops enter into that realm, they not only overextend themselves but also compromise the proper mission of lay people. If the Holy Spirit provides each member of the Church with the grace he needs to fulfill his vocation, then it is the layman who has the gifts appropriate to practical political work; his own judgment is more reliable than that of the bishops.

A similar dichotomy exists in Catholic teaching between matters of principle and matters of prudential judgment. As arbiters of official Catholic teaching, the bishops have the authority to define the principles of the faith, and set norms for ethical behavior; thus, for instance, the bishops are well within their realm when they assert the unyielding Catholic opposition to abortion. But the individual must settle prudential questions for himself.

The principles underlying the economic pastoral are reasonably clear. No orthodox Catholic should dispute the bishops' claim that we must help alleviate the sufferings of the poor. But how can this best be done? The variety of answers to that question is great; no one has a definitive solution. On the individual level, the bishops rightly teach that comfortable Americans must make their own contribution to the struggle against poverty. But each person must judge for himself exactly how much generosity his family situation allows, and how his help can have the most impact. These are highly detailed judgments; no formula can apply to every individual. A prudent Christian with an informed conscience can best judge his own situation.

Alongside those theological arguments, there is a sound practical argument for leaving practical politics to the laity. Catholic laymen hold widely differing opinions on partisan political questions. If each person follows his own conscience, and strives to embody Catholic social teachings as best he can, the Church can hope that these conflicts of opinion will enrich the nation's political discourse. But if one group of Catholics—lay or clerical—claims the mantle of the Church's authority, a potential problem arises.

Since many Catholics disagree with one another, at least some of

them must be wrong. If a few individual laymen are proved wrong, no one will be surprised. But if the National Conference of Catholic Bishops advocates a specific policy and experience proves that policy misguided, the laity might begin to lose confidence in the bishops' authority. Despite the NCCB disclaimers about "levels of authority"—or rather, because the levels of authority are confused within the pastoral letters—many Catholics might fail to recognize the distinction between a mistake in practical judgment and an error in fundamental principle. They might wonder: if the bishops are wrong about economics, how can we know that they are right about the Trinity?

On a more immediate level, when the bishops make detailed judgments on public policy, they hamper their own efforts to promote Catholic social teachings. Long before the advent of nuclear weapons, the Church had consistently taught that direct attacks on innocent civilians cannot be justified. The American bishops reiterated that point in their 1983 "peace pastoral." But when that document was published, media coverage of the bishops' specific proposals—on the nuclear freeze, the MX missile, and the "no first use" policy—obscured the message. Thus the bishops' most authoritative statement was lost in the discussion of their debatable practical judgments.

The Authority of the Bishops' Conference

Even if the "levels of authority" in a pastoral letter are completely clear, one final question remains. The Catholic Church recognizes the authority of an individual bishop within his diocese, and the worldwide authority of the bishops in union with the pope. But how much authority does a national bishops' conference hold?

In January 1983, several American bishops were invited to the Vatican for an international "consultation" on nuclear weapons. There the Prefect of the Papal Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, raised the question whether an episcopal conference has *any* formal teaching authority. In the Catholic scheme of things, Ratzinger pointed out, the individual bishop has a *mandatum docendi*—a mission as a teacher—as does the entire Synod composed of all the world's bishops. But a national episcopal conference is a different sort of institution. It has an undeniable role in the Church, helping prelates work together on issues of common concern. But does it have a formal teaching authority of its own, apart from the authority of the individual bishops? That is not clear.

The outcome of the bishops' deliberations on nuclear weapons illus-

trate the difficulty of the question. The American bishops issued a highly circumscribed, tentative, grudging acceptance of nuclear deterrence. The German bishops, in a pastoral letter of their own, were much more supportive of deterrence policy. And when the bishops of France issued their pastoral, they favored such a policy even more strongly. The three episcopal conferences all agreed on the fundamental Catholic principles: that the arms race must somehow be stopped, and that intentional nuclear attacks on innocent civilians cannot be morally justified. Then they parted company.

It is impossible, in the Catholic scheme of things, that a Catholic in France would hold one *doctrine*, while his equally Catholic counterpart in the United States held another. If the political prescriptions put forth by the French bishops differ from those recommended by the U.S. hierarchy—and they do—then their differences must involve matters of prudential judgment rather than moral principle. So those differences are a clear indication to the Catholic laity that the bishops' views are not morally binding.

Since he introduced the point in January 1983, Cardinal Ratzinger has often repeated his argument against overestimating the authority of the national bishops' conferences. In a widely publicized interview in the Italian magazine *Gesù*, Ratzinger pointed out that at crucial stages in church history, individual bishops have carried the burden of Catholic teaching authority. In his own native Germany, for instance, many individual bishops issued bold condemnations of Nazism, while the national episcopal conference kept its silence. Ratzinger bluntly concluded that, on balance, the episcopal conferences had hurt more than helped the Church since Vatican II.

Cardinal Ratzinger is not the only powerful prelate worried about the growing power of episcopal conferences and their staffs. As long ago as 1978, French Cardinal Paul Gouyon wrote in *L'Année Canonique*:

> A relatively significant number of bishops never express themselves during the plenary sessions. Some, who during the early years of their participation readily took the floor, simply have decided now not to intervene any longer. . . . Once the general meeting is adjourned, the bishop returns to his own diocese. Some powerful structures, administrative boards, commissions, and departments supply him with information on all the problems about which he can hope to be enlightened, but in the face of which he is defenseless. . . . The bishop feels himself inferior to these commissions

> and only participates in one of them. . . . Thus, the temptation to take refuge in silence even if he is vaguely aware of being out of step.

In defending the activism of the episcopal conferences, several American scholars (notably Avery Dulles, S.J.) have pointed out that the Church is governed by "collegial" structures in which the bishops join together to express their authority collectively. If bishops from around the world can speak authoritatively for the universal Church, in this view, a national bishops' conference can speak authoritatively for the Church within that country.

This argument ignores, however, the fundamental premise on which a bishop's authority is based. Again, the bishop is considered an accurate judge of doctrine not because of his theological training but because of the special grace provided by the Holy Spirit. By the same token, the worldwide synod of bishops is not considered authoritative because there is strength in numbers; the Holy Spirit is not subject to a majority vote. Rather, the college of bishops is authoritative because when all the world's bishops gather together, they can speak on behalf of the universal Church—which *does* enjoy the Spirit's protection. A national bishops' conference, based in one corner of the world, cannot make the same claim; Catholic truths cannot be governed by accidents of geography.

Until ecclesiastical authorities shed a clarifying light on the role of the episcopal conference, the authority of the NCCB's pastoral letter might best be left as an open question. Archbishop Weakland himself explained why, in his May 1985 address at Georgetown University:

> So often in the history of God's people we find that He has spoken through the whisper, the small voice. One person could have the insight that is correct and needed; one single voice could hold the truth. All of this is to say that there is a third partner in the dialogue and in the process—the voice of the Spirit. We are, after all, church (*sic*)—not some political body. Thus prayer, reflection and discernment are as much needed as computer printouts. Listening, praying, reflecting take time and a certain distance. It is our task in preparing a document for the bishops to reflect in the light of Scripture and Catholic social teaching on all the comments received. Church (*sic*) requires, thus, a different process.

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